

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

April 4, 2002 LB 1115, 1309

amendment deals with the funding source used by two of the seven drug courts currently operating in the state of Nebraska. This funding and the program it comes from was eliminated by an amendment to LB 1309, our budget bill now on Select File. My amendment does not add or delete an appropriation in the overall budget. My amendment simply allows the Department of Corrections to appropriately manage their funding and to continue to address the responsibility given to them by the Nebraska Legislature back in 1993 in the Office of Community Justice through the Community Correction Facilities and Programs Act. Unfortunately, I voted in favor of eliminating the funding for the Office of Community Justice because at the time of the vote I did not fully understand the issue. I would change my vote, not only because the Cheyenne County Drug Court will die without it or that the Central Nebraska Drug Court will be negatively affected by it, but because of the manner in which it was handled. Eliminating the funding from the Office of Community Justice looked like a simple amendment but it was actually changing the policy of the state without an open discussion of what was really happening. I don't really think we should make that sort of policy decision and so easily dismiss years of work by previous legislators without discussions and decisions-making. The argument was that the program was ineffective. Admittedly, the raw numbers looked that way, but the Office of Community Justice is charged with much more than granting funds. They are charged with community involvement, education, and planning directly related to the offenders. Much of their administrative costs goes to that portion of their duties when they attend county commission meetings, city council meetings, and other community meetings to discuss and help counties prioritize the needs of that particular county. That type of work takes money and time, lots of time. It takes a degree of expertise which the Department of Corrections has obtained in their personal choices...in their personnel choices. The Office of Community Justice was part of the 1993 crime bill. The large dollar items in these bills were the McCook work camp and the Tecumseh prison. Those two facilities were the bigger budget items. Initial funding for this program was granted in 1997. It was the intent of the Legislature at the time to increase funding to fulfill the statutory responsibility given to this program. Corrections has